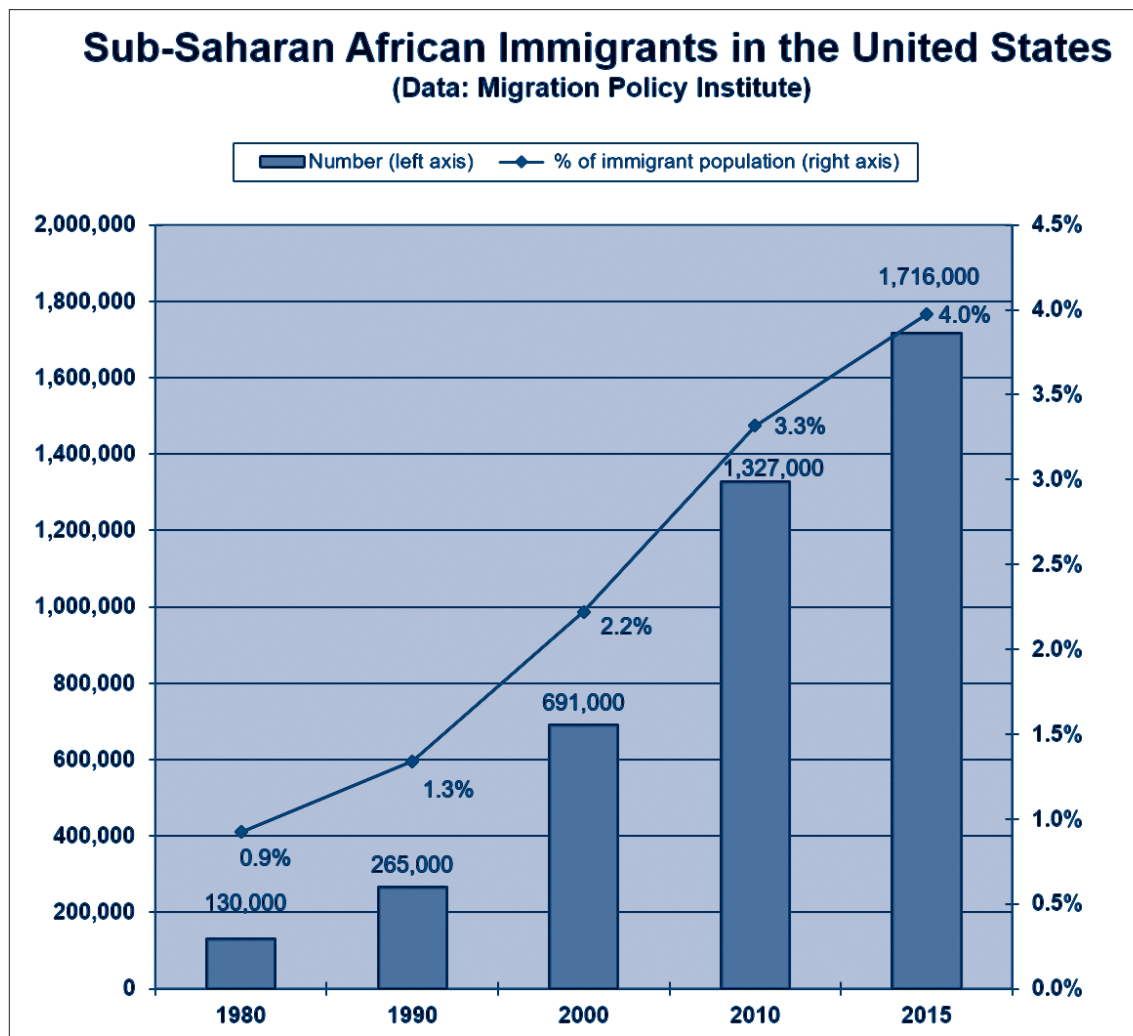


## AFRICAN IMMIGRATION HURTS THE U.S...AND AFRICA

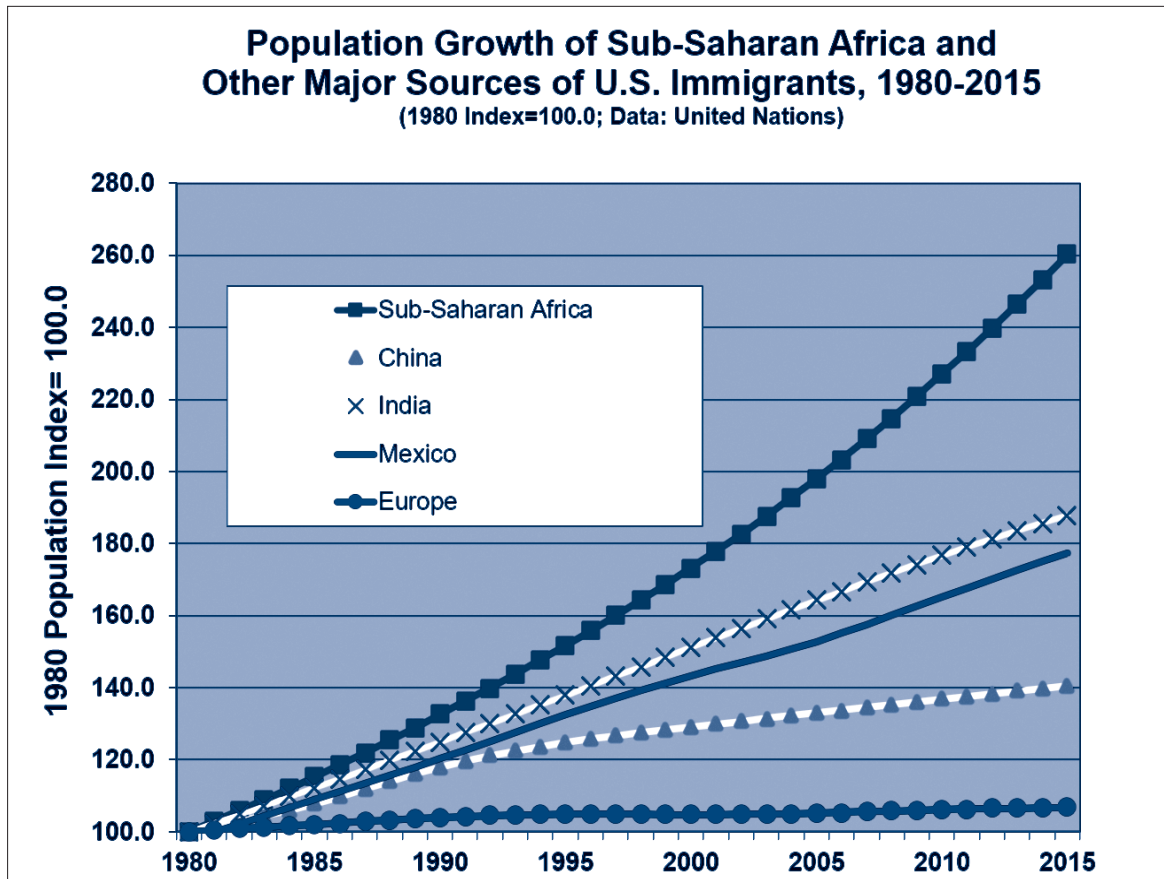
An NPG Forum Paper  
by Edwin S. Rubenstein

Unlike other advanced industrial countries U.S. population continues to increase, mainly because of immigration. That is a well-known fact. Not nearly so well-known is the role of Sub-Saharan immigrants in driving U.S. population growth. The overall growth of this population has been nothing short of extraordinary:



The Sub-Saharan African immigrant population roughly doubled every decade between 1980 and 2010, and rose by another 29% from 2010 to 2015. In 2016 (latest available data) 1,769,778 lived in the U.S., accounting for 4% of the nation's 43 million immigrants. Their share will inevitably increase: Eight percent of persons granted legal permanent resident status in 2015 were Sub-Saharan Africans, as were more than one-third of all refugees admitted that year.

The oversized role played by Sub-Saharan Africans in U.S. population growth should not come as a surprise. For decades the region's population has grown faster than other major sources of U.S. immigrants.



The main reason for Sub-Saharan population growth is a sharp decline in infant and child mortality without a commensurate reduction in fertility rates, as occurred in Asia during its demographic transition in the 1990s. In China, lower child mortality was coupled with a single-child policy and increased access to contraceptives; the results are evident in the inflection of the China line. India has recently replaced Mexico and China as the leading source of new U.S. immigrants – an outcome also consistent with the graphic.

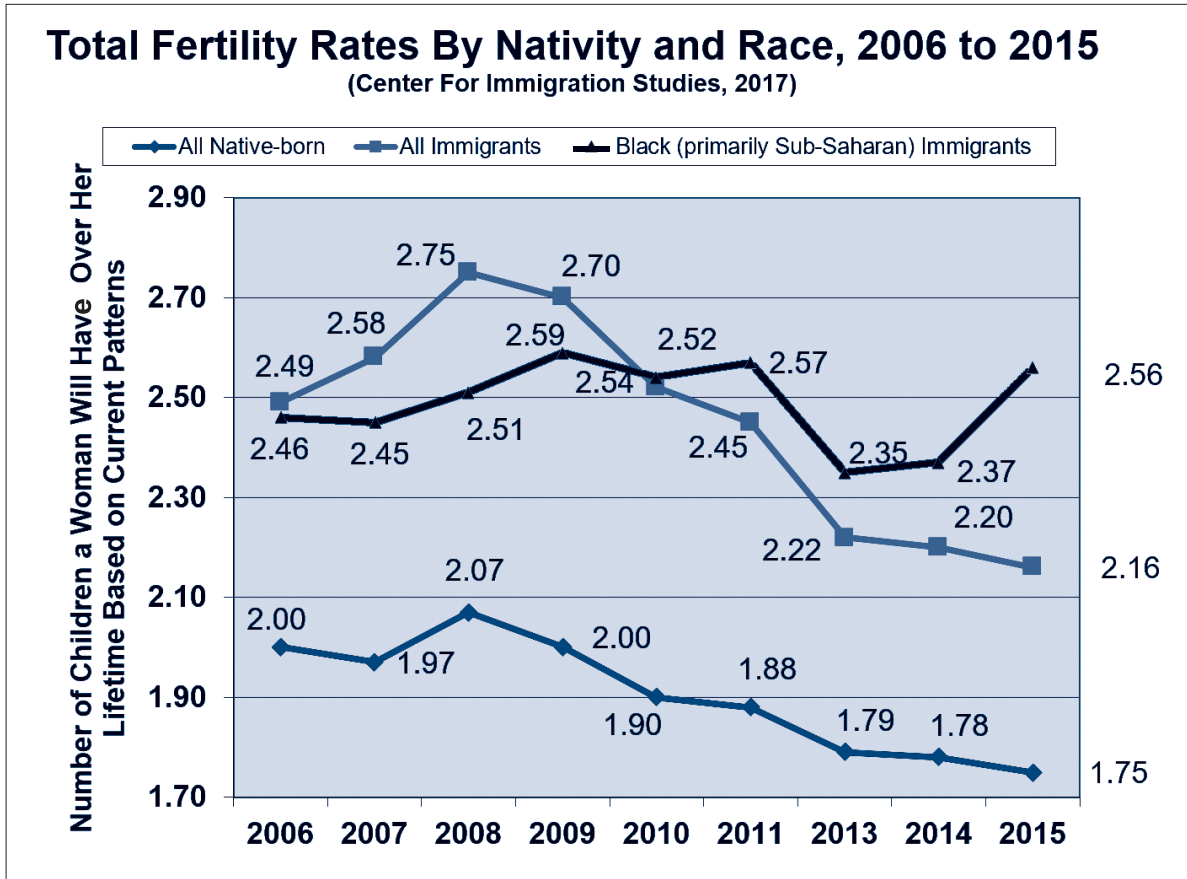
In 1980, Sub-Saharan Africa's population was about 370 million; today it is over 1 billion. It is projected to double again, to 2.2 billion by 2050 – that's close to the entire world population of 1950.

Sub-Saharan women reportedly *want* fewer children, but their political leaders still believe that education and economic growth alone will trigger a reduction in fertility. The ultimate goal is the elusive “demographic dividend,” a reduction in the number of children each worker must support.

“...To trigger such a sharp fall,” write demographic scholars John May and Hans Groth, “countries must achieve a contraceptive revolution, in which more than 75 per cent of couples are using modern contraceptive methods. The current rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is only 26 per cent.”<sup>1</sup>

Do the procreation proclivities of Sub-Saharan Africans travel to the U.S. when they migrate here? If they follow the lead of other immigrant groups, the answer is a resounding NO! Over the course of their lifetimes a typical immigrant woman can expect to have far fewer children here than had she remained in her home country. The Total Fertility Rate for Sub-Saharan immigrant women in the U.S. is 2.56, well below the stratospheric 4.8 children they could expect in their homeland.<sup>2</sup>

But Sub-Saharan immigrants may not be typical. In recent years, while immigrant fertility rates have generally declined, they have bucked the trend.



TFR is an estimate of the average number of children a mother will have over her lifetime. In calculating a group’s TFR, demographers take into account the age at which a woman is likely to have children, as well as the chance of her dying before her reproductive lifetime is over. A TFR of 2.1 is regarded as the “replacement” level. TFRs below that level will, if maintained over a generation *with zero net immigration*, reduce a nation’s population. Above that level, population will continue growing.

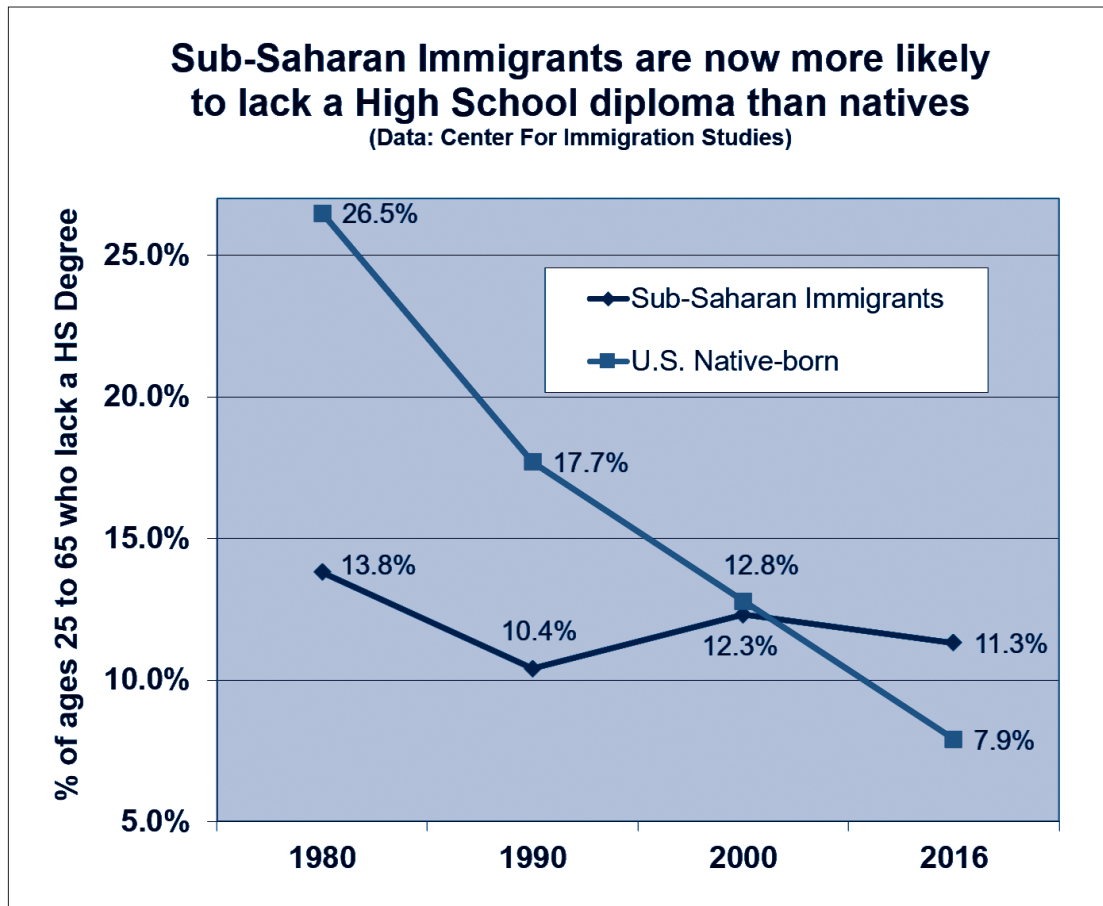
TFRs for native-born women have been below replacement for more than a decade, and are falling. Immigrant TFRs, while above replacement, have been falling since the Great Recession hit in 2008. Sub-Saharan immigrants are the exception: their TFR spiked in 2015 and is higher than it was before 2008.

**High Sub-Saharan fertility, combined with rapid growth in this immigrant population, will – if continued - make it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve NPG’s goal of a sustainable U.S. population.**

Why the persistently high fertility? Data for individual source countries may provide clues.

Birth Rates for Immigrant Women, 2014 (Births per 1,000 women age 15 to 44)	
Region/Country/Characteristics	Births per 1,000
<b>Sub-Saharan Immigrants</b>	101
<b>Somalia</b>	128
<b>Nigeria</b>	110
<b>Ethiopia</b>	88
<b>All Immigrants</b>	75
<b>Immigrants in Poverty</b>	99
<b>Predominantly Moslem countries</b>	83
<b>English-Speaking Countries</b>	52
<b>All Natives</b>	59

Data: Steven Camarota, *Fertility Among Immigrants Varies Significantly*, CIS, November 30, 2015.



Immigrant TFRs are not available by country, but we do have crude birth rates (births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44) for several Sub-Saharan countries.

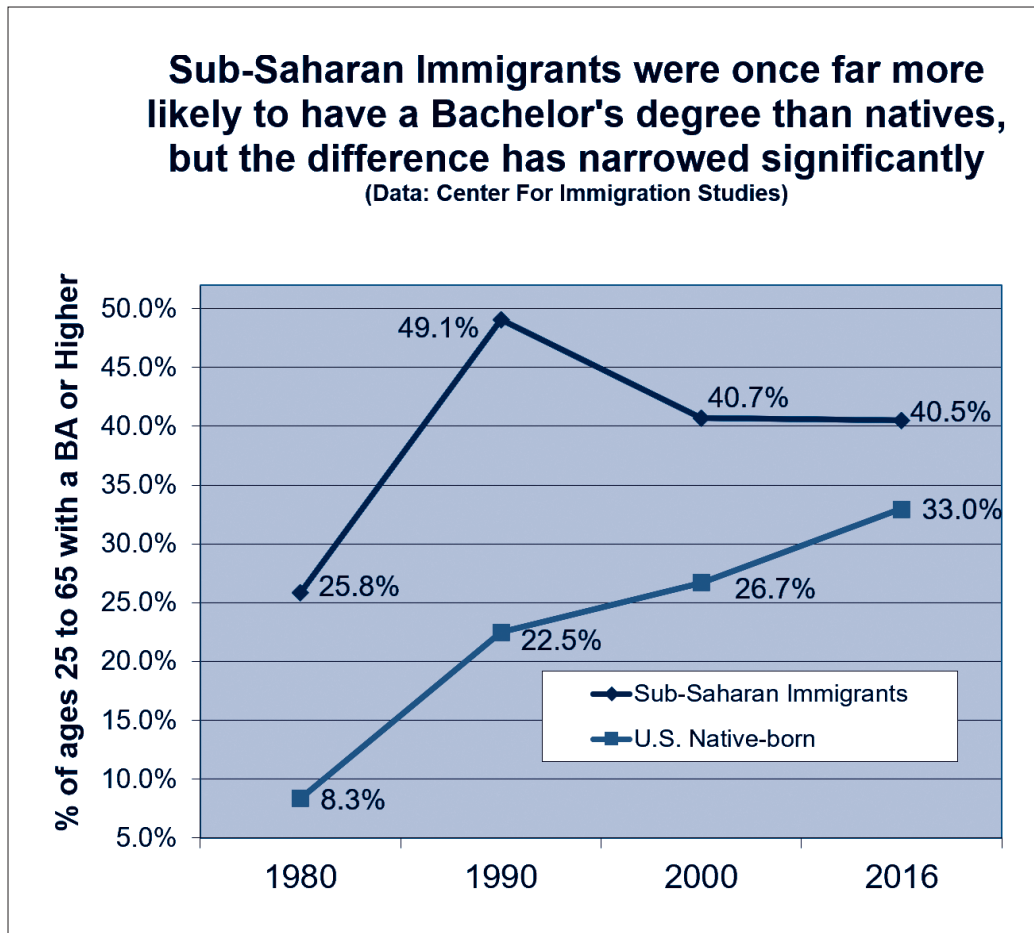
Among Sub-Saharan Immigrants for which we have data, Somalis have the highest birth rate (128 births per 1,000 women) followed by Nigerians (110), and Ethiopians (88). Somalis and Ethiopians are predominantly refugees and Moslem, while Nigerians – the largest group of Sub-Saharan immigrants – are predominantly English-speaking Christians. It is a complicated issue, for sure, but religion, language, and the mode of migrating to the U.S. appear to play a role.

There are also political factors at work. Several longstanding Sub-Saharan political leaders are overtly pro-natalist, equating population growth with political power. In this context, feminism is seen as a political threat. The feminist movement is less developed in Sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions, notably Latin America and the Philippines, where TFRs are falling.

## THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST? NO LONGER

Relative to population, the U.S. is one of the world's largest "importer" of immigrants, and Sub-Saharan Africa the world's greatest "exporter" of emigrants. Distance and Sub-Saharan poverty constrain the interchange between the two, however. The vast majority of Sub-Saharan migrants (5 million between 2010 and 2017) move to other Sub-Saharan countries. Europe was the destination of about one million of the region's migrants during that period, while another 400,000 came to the United States.<sup>3</sup>

U.S. immigration policy enables Sub-Saharans to overcome the daunting economic obstacles they would otherwise face. In 2015 half of them entered the country via chain migration, either as immediate relatives of U.S. citizens (42%) or through family sponsored preferences (10%.) Newly minted Sub-Saharan green card holders are also much more



likely to have entered as refugees (26%) or via the Diversity Visa Lottery (16%) than the average immigrant.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, new Sub-Saharan arrivals are far less likely to be sponsored by employers (5% in 2015) compared to a 14% rate for all new green cards issued that year.<sup>5</sup>

The tilt toward family reunification, humanitarian, and random criteria in admitting Sub-Saharans inevitably impacts educational quality. As their numbers have increased, the educational status of African immigrants has declined relative to U.S.-born natives. In 1980 adult Sub-Saharans were far less likely to lack a High School Degree than native-born Americans. By 2016 their relative positions changed:

At the other end of the educational spectrum we see a more subtle diminution in relative standing vis a vis native-born Americans:

For more than 35 years the share of Sub-Saharan immigrants with bachelor's degrees has exceeded

that of U.S. natives. Even more surprising: they are more likely to have a bachelor's degree than immigrants from more advanced countries.

At first glance this last point may seem highly implausible, but it's easy to see how it works. If you are an educated Nigerian with big career aspirations, your prospects in Nigeria are relatively bleak. You either go out or go small. By contrast, a talented, educated person in, say, Japan or Israel can do fine staying at home. As a result, Nigerians are among the most educated U.S. immigrants, with 57% holding a bachelor's degree in 2015. They rank eighth among the 80 national groups the Census Bureau collects bachelor's degree data on.<sup>6</sup>

Educational credentials are important, of course. But they are not the only factor determining economic success. The quality of the institution granting a college degree or HS diploma is crucial. Was it located in the U.S.? In Sub-Saharan Africa? Census data is silent on this.

The immigrant's language is another important variable. English is obviously preferred in the U.S., but "Contrary to expectations larger emigration increases were found in Africa's non-English than English speaking countries."<sup>7</sup>

### MEANWHILE, BACK IN AFRICA

Sub-Saharan countries spend untold millions educating doctors, financial analysts, architects, and other skilled professionals. Within a few years of graduation most of them migrate to greener pastures in the United States or Europe.

While brain drains of this sort are not unique to Africa - about 80% of Indian computer programmers emigrate to the U.S. - Africa is the biggest loser. A 2013 U.N. report shows one in nine Africans with a graduate degree - 2.9 million people - were living in developed countries. That is a 50% growth in 10 years, more than any other region in the world.<sup>8</sup>

The Sub-Saharan talent pool was shallow to begin with. The loss of so many skilled migrants forces many countries to import expatriates from brain drainer countries. The new crew are expensive, as they expect to be paid in hard currency. Many will teach a new generation of locals; the cycle will repeat indefinitely.

There are some brain drain optimists who claim that the financial benefits - mainly the remittances migrants wire home to those left behind - exceed the costs. Can an influx of financial capital ever offset

the loss of human capital? There are limits. You can use remittance money to import expertise, you can use it to import information, but you cannot import a life saving operation.

This from an analysis of the American Medical Association Masterfile:

**Physician emigration from Sub-Saharan Africa, which has only 2% of the global physician workforce but a quarter of the global burden of disease, is particularly worrying. Since 1970, as a result of large-scale emigration and limited medical education, there has been negligible or negative growth in the density of physicians in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Liberia, for example, in 1973, there were 7.76 physicians per 100,000 people but by 2008 there were only 1.37 physicians per 100,000 people; in the US, there are 250 physicians per 100,000 people.<sup>9</sup>**

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the brain drain is slowing, or even reversing, as African medical personnel trickle back to Africa. It turns out that the much ballyhooed U.S. doctor shortage that attracted them here in the first place exists mainly in remote, rural parts of the U.S. - places where even refugees do not want to live or practice medicine.<sup>10</sup> The reverse flow, if maintained, would be a win-win for both Africa and U.S.-born students willing to fill the stateside doctor shortage.

CO-2 Emissions Per Capita, 2014 (Metric tons)		
Home Country	Level	U.S. as Multiple of Each
United States	16.49	1.0X
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.84	19.6X
Nigeria	0.55	30.0X
Ethiopia	0.12	137.4X
Somalia	0.05	329.8X
Ghana	0.54	30.5X
Mexico	3.90	4.2X
China	7.54	2.2X
India	1.73	9.5X

Data: World Bank

## **GLOBAL WARMING: A HOT REGION GETS HOTTER**

In deciding to come to the U.S., climate change is probably the last thing on an immigrant's mind. In making that decision, however, Sub-Saharan immigrants influence the trajectory of global warming more than immigrants from any other region. By moving here they leave one of the least CO-2 intensive regions of the world for one of the most intensive:

The following table shows per capita emissions vary with the level of economic development. Thus U.S. residents generated an average 16.49 metric tons (MT) of CO-2 per capita in 2014, or nearly 20-times the 0.84 tons generated by a typical Sub-Saharan African. Conversely, immigrants from Somalia, one of the poorest countries in the region, generate about 330-times more CO-2 here than in Somalia, while an Ethiopian immigrant generates about 137-times more. The resulting increase in CO-2 impacts all nations, especially those where water is scarce such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Immigrants from more traditional countries of origin – Mexico, China, and India – also expand their carbon footprints by migrating here, but by far smaller multiples. Their homelands are more highly developed than Sub-Saharan African countries.

This is not to say that new immigrants immediately generate as much CO-2 as the average American. Income matters, and immigrants generally earn less than the native-born. But there is a strong positive correlation between income and emissions, and as they assimilate into the American culture and economy, their emissions will follow suit.

In this sense, the act of immigrating is no different from the act of giving birth: Both add a new source of future CO-2 emissions from this country. Of course, had immigrants remained in their home countries they would have still produced some CO-2, but their output would have been far less. Immigration to the U.S. represents a large-

scale transfer of population from countries with comparatively low per capita emissions to one of the highest.

As the world's largest per capita emitter, the U.S. exerts more leverage on climate change than any other nation. Reducing U.S. population is essential. Curbing immigration to this country, especially from countries with below average CO-2 levels, offers the quickest and most efficient way of fighting global warming. All countries will benefit from such a move.

## **CONCLUSION**

For decades Sub-Saharan Africans have been among the most rapidly growing immigrant groups. As their numbers have increased, however, their educational status has deteriorated relative to other immigrants and the native-born. A disproportionate number enter as chain migrants or refugees. Relatively few are sponsored by U.S. employers in need of their skills, though this small number looms large relative to the shallow talent pools they left behind.

While fertility rates for U.S. natives and most immigrants are declining, rates for Sub-Saharan immigrants are rising. This trend has ominous implications for NPG's goal of a sustainable U.S. population.

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**Edwin S. Rubenstein**, president of ESR Research, is an experienced business researcher, financial analyst, and economics journalist. He has written extensively on federal tax policy, government waste, the Reagan legacy, and – most recently – on immigration. He is the author of two books: *The Right Data* (1994) and *From the Empire State to the Vampire State: New York in a Downward Transition* (with Herbert London). His essays on public policy have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *Newsday*, and *National Review*. His TV appearances include *Firing Line*, *Bill Moyers*, *McNeil-Lehr*, *CNBC*, and *Debates-Debates*. Mr. Rubenstein has a B.A. from Johns Hopkins and a graduate degree in economics from Columbia University.

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